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CIVIL AIR PATROL LOCATES SITE OF HELICOPTER CRASH

TEMECULA, CA – A Civil Air Patrol (CAP) aircraft and flight crew located the site this afternoon where a helicopter had crashed late Saturday afternoon in rugged terrain in northern San Diego County.

The CAP was alerted by the United States Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. The AFRCC immediately notified the CAP of a possible aircraft crash in the Southern California area. The CAP dispatched an aircraft and aircrew Sunday afternoon to locate the source of a radio distress signal believed to be coming from an aircraft Emergency Locator Transmitter in the Ramona or Julian area of northern San Diego County, approximately 25 miles north of San Diego, according to Capt. Bob Keilholtz, a spokesman and Incident Commander with the CAP. Additional CAP ground search and rescue teams were sent into the area.

Using electronic radio direction finding equipment, the CAP aircrew located the approximate site of the source of the distress signal. “The distress signal was coming from a very steep and deep ravine,” said Capt. Walter Lutz, a member of the CAP flight crew. “The radio signal was very weak and we could only hear the signal when we flew directly overhead,” Lutz said. “The position of the aircraft at the bottom of the steep ravine possibly prevented the radio signal from being picked up by the satellites,” said Lutz.

Due to the ruggedness of the terrain and approaching darkness, it was impossible to visually spot the wreckage from the air. “The top of the ravine was at approximately 2,500 feet elevation and it was very deep,” said Lutz. The crash site was in a rural area near the border of Riverside and San Diego counties.

While circling overhead, the CAP flight crew spotted a Robinson R-22 helicopter on the ground above the ravine. After contacting the pilot, it was determined that the crew of this helicopter was not in any distress. The occupants were representatives from the USA Academy of Aviation in French Valley, near the city Murrieta. “They had come to the crash site to survey the condition and position of the wreckage,” said Lutz.

A helicopter that crashed late Saturday afternoon was identified as the source of the radio distress signal. General aviation aircraft, including helicopters, carry Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELT) that continuously broadcast a radio distress signal after a crash or when manually activated. This radio signal is picked up by orbiting satellites and used to lead rescue

personnel to the site of a crashed aircraft. The CAP uses specialized electronic radio direction finding equipment to locate crashed aircraft.

The two-seat Robinson R-22 Beta II helicopter carried two passengers. It is believed they were on a sightseeing flight when the helicopter lost engine power and the pilot forced to make an autorotation crash landing. The USA Academy of Aviation owns the crashed helicopter.

After the R-22 helicopter crashed into the ravine, one of the occupants was able to climb out to a high location and call 911 on their cellular telephone according to Sgt. Kennedy Smith of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. The site of the crash was located with the assistance of the Riverside and San Diego county Sheriff Department air support units. Both passengers were transported to a local hospital for medical evaluation and treatment. The exact cause of the crash is not known.

The CAP aircrew consisted of CAP members Capt. Walter Lutz and 1st Lt. Peter Zeeman who piloted a Cessna single engine aircraft equipped with communications and electronic radio directing finding equipment. The CAP ground team was composed of Maj. Bob Miller, Capt. Tom Charpentier, and 1st Lt. Cathy Livoni. Additional CAP mission base personnel included Capt. Bob Keilholtz, who served as Incident Commander and ran this search mission, 1st Lt. Shane Terpstra serving as Operations Director, Capt. Larry Riddle providing communications support, and 2Lt. Chris Storey as Mission Information Officer. CAP was assisted with intelligence gathering for this mission by Sgt. Christine Robbins, search and rescue coordinator for the San Diego County Sheriff's Department.

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